

IN THE HIGH COURT OF GUJARAT AT AHMEDABAD

SPECIAL CIVIL APPLICATION No 9199 of 1997

For Approval and Signature:

Hon'ble MR.JUSTICE H.R.SHELAT

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1. Whether Reporters of Local Papers may be allowed to see the judgements?
 2. To be referred to the Reporter or not?
 3. Whether Their Lordships wish to see the fair copy of the judgement?
 4. Whether this case involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution of India, 1950 of any Order made thereunder?
 5. Whether it is to be circulated to the Civil Judge?

IMRAN @ MUNNO HABIBBHAI PATHAN.....Petitioner

Versus

STATE OF GUJARAT.....Respondents

Appearance:

MR HR PRAJAPATI for Petitioner
MR SR DIVETIYA ADD. GOVERNMENT PLEADER
for Respondent No. 1, 2, 3

CORAM : MR.JUSTICE H.R.SHELAT

Date of decision: 06/02/98

ORAL JUDGEMENT

By this application, under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, the petitioner calls in question the legality and validity of the detention order passed by the Commissioner of Police, Rajkot City on 1st July, 1997, invoking the powers under Sec.3(2) of the Gujarat Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (for short "the Act "), consequent upon which the petitioner came to be arrested and at present is under detention.

2. In order to appreciate the rival contentions,

necessary facts in brief may be stated. The Police Commissioner for the City of Rajkot had received certain information against the petitioner. He was appraised that the petitioner being riotous person and a fiend by his subversive activities, was disturbing the public order and terrorising the people. He then came to know during his visit to different Police Stations, and on examination of the records of the Police Stations; that three complaints of the offences punishable under Sec. 457 -380- 379 were filed and investigation thereof was going on. After inquisition, the Police Commissioner also found that the petitioner was a head-strong person i.e. a tartar, desperado & decimator, and by different criminal activities, he was terrorising the people and wielding the sceptre. He was extorting money, causing injuries to the persons and/or causing damage to the properties. By diabolism, he used to cause the people to bend his way. He forced to provide him vehicles, or shelter, or part with valuable articles. He used to snatch away the chains or ornaments or money, wielding weapon. The shop-keeper faded out of his irksome demands and roguery had to pull down their shutters. The helpless people had to resign themselves to his terror so as to be exploited and molested cruelly. The people were feeling insecure and were constant under the fear of violence or wrong being done anywhere at any time. His hellish, infernal and despotic activities disturbing public order and creating the fear of psychosis were going berserk. No one was, therefore, ready to come forward and state against him. After considerable persuasion and when assurance was given that the facts about them disclosing their identity would be kept secret, some of the witnesses have under great tension stated against the petitioner. After a detailed inquiry, the Police Commissioner found that to curb anti-social activities viz. subversive riotous, discourteous and chaotic activities of the petitioner, shattering & battering the public life and order and leading to anarchy, ordinary law was falling short and was sounding dull. The only way out to hold him in kittle was to detain him under the Act. He, therefore, passed the impugned order. Consequent upon the same, the petitioner came to be arrested and at present, is in custody.

3. On behalf of the petitioner, challenging the impugned order, it is submitted that the order in question is passed after a great delay, as a result, the continuous detention has been rendered illegal. There was no justification for the authority passing the detention order withholding opportunity, exercising the privilege under Sec.9(2) of the Act. The detaining

authority ought to have disclosed the particulars of the witnesses whose statements were recorded in support of the order passed. No doubt, under Section 9 of the Act, the authority has the privilege, but that is to be exercised judiciously, and not arbitrarily or capriciously so as to deprive the detenu of his right to have effective representation. As the particulars were not given, the petitioner was deprived of his right to have the effective representation against the order. The instances about the offences noted in the order were not sufficient to brand him a dangerous person or to form a reasonable belief that maintenance of public order was adversely affected. The statements recorded are vague and necessary particulars when wanting the order is bad in law and is liable to be quashed.

4. Mr.Divetiya, the learned AGP has vehemently refuted the submissions made, submitting that there is no delay on the part of the authority passing the order of detention, promptly order was passed, and in the public interest, certain facts & particulars are withheld. When query was made, both confined to the only point namely exercise of privilege u/s. 9(2) of the Act. I will therefore, abstain from dwelling upon other grounds.

5. It would be better if the law about the non-disclosure of certain facts is elucidated. Reading Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India, what becomes clear is that the grounds on which order of detention is passed are required to be communicated to the detenu. The detenu is, therefore, required to be informed not merely factual inference and factual material which led to inference namely not to disclose certain facts but also the sources from which the factual material is gathered. The disclosure of sources can enable the detenu to draw the attention of the detaining authority in the course of his representation to the fact whether the factual material collected from such sources would be relied upon and used against him on the facts and circumstances of the case. Subject to the limitation mentioned in Article 22(6) of the Constitution of India and Section 9(2) of the Act, the detaining authority is of course empowered to withhold such facts and particulars, the disclosure of which he considers to be against the public interest. The privilege of non-disclosure has to be exercised sparingly and in those cases, where public interest dictating non-disclosure overrides the public interest requiring disclosure. Hence the detaining authority must be fully satisfied on the basis of overall study that the apprehension expressed by the informant is honest, genuine and

reasonable in the circumstances of the case. With a view to satisfy itself whether the fear of violence and consequential feelings of insecurity or apprehension of a wrong would be done to them at any time by the detenu by those making statement against the detenu is imaginary or fanciful; or an empty excuse or well-founded for disclosing or not disclosing certain facts or particulars of those persons, the authority making the order has to make necessary inquiry applying his mind. What can be deduced from such constitutional as well as legal scheme whereunder obligation to furnish the grounds and the duty to consider whether the disclosure of any facts involved therein is against public interest are both vested in the detaining authority and not in any other. The authority passing the order of detention has to apply his mind and should itself be satisfied to the question whether or not the supply of the relevant particulars and materials would be injurious to the public interest. If the task of recording statements and necessary inquiry is entrusted to others, and if he mechanically endorses or accepts the recommendation of others or subordinate authority in that behalf without applying mind and taking his own decision, the exercise of power would be vitiated as arbitrary. What is further required is that the detaining authority must file his affidavit to satisfy the court that he had sincerely and honestly applied the mind for the bonafide exercise of the powers about disclosure and privilege regarding non-disclosure so that the court can examine rational connection between the ground disclosed or not disclosed in public interest. If no affidavit explaining the exercise of the power is filed, the court can infer against the detaining authority. If the affidavit is filed explaining the exercise of the power, the detenu may challenge the privilege exercised on the ground that the same is vitiated by factual or legal malafides. For my such view, a reference to a decision in the case of Bai Amina, W/o. Ibrahim Abdul Rahim Alla Vs. State of Gujarat and others- 22 G.L.R. 1186 held to be the good law by the Full Bench of this Court in the case of Chandrakant N. Patel Vs. State of Gujrat & Others 35(1) [1994(1)] G.L.R. 761, may be made.

6. In view of such law, the authority passing the detention order has to satisfy the court that it was absolutely necessary in the public interest to suppress the particulars about witnesses keeping their safety in mind. No doubt, Mr. J.R.Rajput, Under Secretary to the Govt. of Gujarat has filed his affidavit explaining certain facts and governing factors but has shrewdly avoided to state about exercise of privilege u/s. 9(2)

of the Act. It is not stated what materials he considered, how and what type of inquiry he made and whether he was by application of mind subjectively satisfied that the fear expressed by the witnesses qua disclosure of their names, addresses and occupation to the petitioner, was neither ill-based nor imaginary or empty excuse but it required anxious consideration, and to safe-guard their safety, i.e. in public interest the particulars about witnesses were required to be suppressed. When for no good cause, explanation is withheld, the case about detention cannot be viewed with favour, but adverse inference can be drawn. It can, therefore, well be said that without application of mind, the authority mechanically accepted the report of his subordinate which is not in consonance with law. Consequently the detention cannot be held legal and maintainable. In view of the matter, the petitioner was entitled to have the particulars about the witnesses so as to make effective representation. Under the guise of privilege, the petitioner could not get the materials to study the case against him. He was thus deprived of his right to have effective representation. The order of detention & continuous detention are, therefore, visitated and bad in law. The same are required to be quashed and set aside.

7. For the aforesaid reasons, this petition is allowed. The order of detention passed on 1st July, 1997 by the Police Commissioner, Rajkot City, is hereby quashed and set aside, and the petitioner-detenu is ordered to be set at liberty forth with, if not required in any other case. Rule accordingly made absolute.

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